O. HENRY'S MASTERPIECES

NO 13.

The Higher Pragmatism

I.

WHERE to go for wisdom has become a question of serious import. The ancients are discredited; Plato is boiler-plate; Aristotle is tottering; Marcus Aurelius is reeling; Esop has been copyrighted by Indiana; Solomon is too solemn; you couldn't get anything out of Epictetus with a pick.

The ant, which for many years served as a model of intelligence and industry in the school-readers, has been proven to be a doddering idiot and a waster of time and effort. The owl today is hooted at. Chautauqua conventions have abandoned culture and adopted diablo. Graybeards give glowing testimonials to the venders of patent hair-restorers. There are typographical errors in the almanacs published by the daily newspapers. College professors have become——

But there shall be no personalities.

To sit in classes, to delve into the encyclopedia or the past-performances page, will not make us wise. As the poet says, "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers." Wisdom is dew, which, while we know it not, soaks into us, refreshes us, and makes us grow. Knowledge is a strong stream of water turned on us through a hose. It disturbs our roots.

Then, let us rather gather wisdom. But how to do so requires knowledge. If we know a thing, we know it; but very often we are not wise to it that we are wise, and——

But let's go on with the story.

II.

Once upon a time I found a ten-cent magazine lying on a bench in a little city park. Anyhow, that was the amount he asked me for when I sat on the bench next to him. He was a musty, dingy, and tattered magazine, with some queer stories bound in him, I was sure. He turned out to be a scrap-book.

"I am a newspaper reporter," I said to him, to try him. "I have been detailed to write up some of the experiences of the unfortunate ones who spend their evenings in this park. May I ask to what you attribute your downfall in——"

I was interrupted by a laugh from my purchase—a laugh so rusty and unpracticed that I was sure it had been his first for many a day.

"Oh, no, no," said he. "You ain't a reporter. Reporters don't talk that way. They pretend to be one of us, and say they've just got in on the blind baggage from St. Louis. I can tell a reporter on sight. Us park bums get to be fine judges of human nature. We sit here all day and watch the people go by. I can size up anybody who walks past my bench in a way that would surprise you."

"Well," I said, "go on and tell me. How do you size me up?"

"I should say," said the student of human nature with unpardonable hesitation, "that you was, say, in the contracting business—or maybe worked in a store—or was a sign-painter. You stopped in the park to finish your cigar, and thought you'd get a little free monologue out of me. Still, you might be a plasterer or a lawyer—it's getting kind of dark, you see. And your wife won't let you smoke at home."

I frowned gloomily.

"But, judging again," went on the reader of men, "I'd say you ain't got a wife."

"No," said I rising restlessly. "No, no, no, I ain't. But I will have, by the arrows of Cupid! That is, if——"

My voice must have trailed away and muffled itself into uncertainty and despair.

"I see you have a story yourself," said the dusty vagrant—impudently, it seemed to me. "Suppose you take your dime back and spin a yarn for me. I'm interested myself in the ups and downs of unfortunate ones who spend their evenings in the park."

Somehow, that amused me. I looked at the frowsy derelict with more interest. I did have a story. Why not tell it to him? I had told none of my friends. I had always been a reserved, bottled-up man. It was psychical timidity or sensitiveness—perhaps both. And I smiled to myself in wonder when I felt an impulse to confide in this stranger and vagabond.

"Jack," said I.

"Mack," said he.

"Mack," said I, "I'll tell you."

"Do you want the dime back in advance?" said he.

I handed him a dollar.

"The dime," said I, "was the price of listening to your story."

"Right on the point of the jaw," said he. "Go on."

And then, incredible as it may seem to the lovers in the world who confide their sorrows only to the night wind and the gibbous moon, I laid bare my secret to that wreck of all things that you would have supposed to be in sympathy with love.

I told him of the days and weeks and months that I had spent in adoring Mildred Telfair. I spoke of my despair, my grievous days and wakeful nights, my dwindling hopes and distress of mind. I even pictured to this night-prowler her beauty and dignity, the great sway she had in society, and the magnificence of her life as the elder daughter of an ancient race whose pride overbalanced the dollars of the city's millionaires.

"Why don't you cop the lady out?" asked Mack, bringing me down to earth and dialect again.

I explained to him that my worth was so small, my income so minute, and my fears so large that I hadn't the courage to speak to her of my worship. I told him that in her presence I could only blush and stammer, and that she looked upon me with a wonderful, maddening smile of amusement.

"She kind of moves in the professional class, don't she?" asked Mack.

"The Telfair family——" I began, haughtily.

"I mean professional beauty," said my hearer.

"She is greatly and widely admired," I answered, cautiously.

"Any sisters?"

"One."

"You know any more girls?"

"Why, several," I answered. "And a few others."

"Say," said Mack, "tell me one thing—can you hand out the dope to other girls? Can you chin 'em and make matinee eyes at 'em and squeeze 'em? You know what I mean. You're just shy when it comes to this particular dame—the professional beauty—ain't that right?"

"In a way you have outlined the situation with approximate truth," I admitted.

"I thought so," said Mack, grimly. "Now, that reminds me of my own case. I'll tell you about it."

I was indignant, but concealed it. What was this loafer's case or anybody's case compared with mine? Besides, I had given him a dollar and ten cents.

"Feel my muscle," said my companion, suddenly, flexing his biceps. I did so mechanically. The fellows in gymns are always asking you to do that. His arm was as hard as cast-iron.

"Four years ago," said Mack, "I could lick any man in New York outside of the professional ring. Your case and mine is just the same. I come from the West Side—between Thirtieth and Fourteenth—I won't give the number on the door. I was a scrapper when I was ten, and when I was twenty no amateur in the city could stand up four rounds with me. 'S a fact. You know Bill McCarty? No? He managed the smokers for some of them swell clubs. Well, I knocked out everything Bill brought up before me. I was a middle-weight, but could train down to a welter when necessary. I boxed all over the West Side at bouts and benefits and private entertainments, and was never put out once.

"But, say, the first time I put my foot in the ring with a professional I was no more than a canned lobster. I dunno how it was—I seemed to lose heart. I guess I got too much imagination. There was a formality and publicness about it that kind of weakened my nerve. I never won a fight in the ring. Light-weights and all kinds of scrubs used to sign up with my manager and then walk up and tap me on the wrist and see me fall. The minute I seen the crowd and a lot of gents in evening clothes down in front, and seen a professional come inside the ropes, I got as weak as ginger-ale.

"Of course, it wasn't long till I couldn't get no backers, and I didn't have any more chances to fight a professional—or many amateurs, either. But lemme tell you—I was as good as most men inside the ring or out. It was just that dumb, dead feeling I had when I was up against a regular that always done me up.

"Well, sir, after I had got out of the business, I got a mighty grouch on. I used to go round town licking private citizens and all kinds of unprofessionals just to please myself. I'd lick cops in dark streets and car-conductors and cab-drivers and draymen whenever I could start a row with 'em. It didn't make any difference how big they were, or how much science they had, I got away with 'em. If I'd only just have had the confidence in the ring that I had beating up the best men outside of it, I'd be wearing black pearls and heliotrope silk socks today.

"One evening I was walking along near the Bowery, thinking about things, when along comes a slumming-party. About six or seven they was, all in swallowtails, and these silk hats that don't shine. One of the gang kind of shoves me off the sidewalk. I hadn't had a scrap in three days, and I just says, 'De-lighted!' and hits him back of the ear.

"Well, we had it. That Johnnie put up as decent a little fight as you'd want to see in the moving pictures. It was on a side street, and no cops around. The other guy had a lot of science, but it only took me about six minutes to lay him out.

"Some of the swallowtails dragged him up against some steps and began to fan him. Another one of 'em comes over to me and says:

"'Young man, do you know what you've done?'

"'Oh, beat it,' says I. 'I've done nothing but a little punching-bag work. Take Freddy back to Yale and tell him to quit studying sociology on the wrong side of the sidewalk.'

"'My good fellow,' says he, 'I don't know who you are, but I'd like to. You've knocked out Reddy Burns, the champion middle-weight of the world! He came to New York yesterday, to try to get a match on with Jim Jeffries. If you——'

"But when I come out of my faint I was laying on the floor in a drug-store saturated with aromatic spirits of ammonia. If I'd known that was Reddy Burns, I'd have got down in the gutter and crawled past him instead of handing him one like I did. Why, if I'd ever been in a ring and seen him climbing over the ropes, I'd have been all to the sal volatile.

"So that's what imagination does," concluded Mack. "And, as I said, your case and mine is simultaneous. You'll never win out. You can't go up against the professionals. I tell you, it's a park bench for yours in this romance business."

Mack, the pessimist, laughed harshly.

"I'm afraid I don't see the parallel," I said, coldly. "I have only a very slight acquaintance with the prize-ring."

The derelict touched my sleeve with his forefinger, for emphasis, as he explained his parable.

"Every man," said he, with some dignity, "has got his lamps on something that looks good to him. With you, it's this dame that you're afraid to say your say to. With me, it was to win out in the ring. Well, you'll lose just like I did."

"Why do you think I shall lose?" I asked warmly.

"'Cause," said he, "you're afraid to go in the ring. You dassen't stand up before a professional. Your case and mine is just the same. You're a amateur; and that means that you'd better keep outside of the ropes."

"Well, I must be going," I said, rising and looking with elaborate care at my watch.

When I was twenty feet away the park-bencher called to me.

"Much obliged for the dollar," he said. "And for the dime. But you'll never get 'er. You're in the amateur class."

"Serves you right," I said to myself, "for hobnobbing with a tramp. His impudence!"

But, as I walked, his words seemed to repeat themselves over and over again in my brain. I think I even grew angry at the man.

"I'll show him!" I finally said, aloud. "I'll show him that I can fight Reddy Burns, too—even knowing who he is."

I hurried to a telephone-booth and rang up the Telfair residence.

A soft, sweet voice answered. Didn't I know that voice? My hand holding the receiver shook.

"Is that you?" said I, employing the foolish words that form the vocabulary of every talker through the telephone.

"Yes, this is I," came back the answer in the low, clear-cut tones that are an inheritance of the Telfairs. "Who is it, please?"

"It's me," said I, less ungrammatically than egotistically. "It's me, and I've got a few things that I want to say to you right now and immediately and straight to the point."

"Dear me," said the voice. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Arden!"

I wondered if any accent on the first word was intended; Mildred was fine at saying things that you had to study out afterward.

"Yes," said I. "I hope so. And now to come down to brass tacks." I thought that rather a vernacularism, if there is such a word, as soon as I had said it; but I didn't stop to apologize. "You know, of course, that I love you, and that I have been in that idiotic state for a long time. I don't want any more foolishness about it—that is, I mean I want an answer from you right now. Will you marry me or not? Hold the wire, please. Keep out, Central. Hello, hello! Will you, or will you not?"

That was just the uppercut for Reddy Burns' chin. The answer came back:

"Why, Phil, dear, of course I will! I didn't know that you—that is, you never said—oh, come up to the house, please—I can't say what I want to over the 'phone. You are so importunate. But please come up to the house, won't you?"

Would I?

I rang the bell of the Telfair house violently. Some sort of a human came to the door and shooed me into the drawing-room.

"Oh, well," said I to myself, looking at the ceiling, "any one can learn from any one. That was a pretty good philosophy of Mack's, anyhow. He didn't take advantage of his experience, but I get the benefit of it. If you want to get into the professional class, you've got to——"

I stopped thinking then. Some one was coming down the stairs. My knees began to shake. I knew then how Mack had felt when a professional began to climb over the ropes. I looked around foolishly for a door or a window by which I might escape. If it had been any other girl approaching, I mightn't have——

But just then the door opened, and Bess, Mildred's younger sister, came in. I'd never seen her look so much like a glorified angel. She walked straight up to me, and—and——

I'd never noticed before what perfectly wonderful eyes and hair Elizabeth Telfair had.

"Phil," she said, in the Telfair, sweet, thrilling tones, "why didn't you tell me about it before? I thought it was sister you wanted all the time, until you telephoned to me a few minutes ago!"

I suppose Mack and I always will be hopeless amateurs. But, as the thing has turned out in my case, I'm mighty glad of it.

ADVERTISING IS NECESSARY TO BUILD UP ARMIES AND NAVIES

By CYRIL H. BRETHERTON.

LEADERS of American thought and action have at last realized that as long as it is customary for nations to do their talking with battleships and battalions—and there is as yet no sign of the custom falling into desuetude—we should have some more potent arguments of the accepted standards than we now possess. Any talk of militarism in connection with the United States is absurd. No other nation in the world has anything we want badly enough to go to war for. But we have a number of things that other nations would be willing to go to war to get, and will go to war with us for when they are not otherwise occupied, unless we are well prepared to talk with our enemies at the gate. The Monroe doctrine is one. Possibly the Philippine Islands are another.

Our professional pacificists, who for the most part are not true disciples of the Prince of Peace, talk about militarism as if it were the condition of any country that is willing and able to take care of itself. As a matter of fact, there are only two great nations that can be said to be militaristic, to have elevated the religion of valour above all others. And it has taken hundreds of years of bloodshed and discipline and an intense feudalism to make them so. But if the thoughtful men of the country are in favor of a greater preparedness for war, there is yet an element among our citizens that is far from being so. The universal suffrage, prohibition, and peace-at-any-price parties which the wise ones expect to see mustered before very long under the political aegis of William Jennings Bryan are strong. And if the country comes through its present difficulties without getting mixed up in the fray, as it no doubt will, it will be strongly urged that we owe it to our want of warlike preparation, which, on some future occasion, would simply lead us into war, where otherwise we would still have maintained peace.

The Future Must Be Considered.

This is, of course, a worthless argument. We have kept out of the present war because the political issues that are really being fought out do not affect us. If we are drawn into the struggle it will be because the central empires, for purposes of their own, succeed in forcing our hands. But other occasions will arise in the future when matters of great import to us will be in issue and then the only reward of unpreparedness will be that we must recede from positions that we have hitherto insisted are vital to our sovereign independence.

It is clear, therefore, at least to those who have attempted to feel the pulse of the rank and file of the American people on the subject, that any substantial accretion of military strength by this country will have to be preceded by a strong campaign, which shall have for its object not only the convincing of the people as to our national necessities in respect to an army, but also the arousing in them of an interest in and an enthusiasm for things naval and military. The present German navy was built up entirely by advertising, press campaigning and lobbying. The German Navy League printed and distributed a periodical "Die Flotte" with a circulation larger than that of the three largest German newspapers. Free excursions were run from the inland villages and towns so that the peasant and burgher who had never before seen the sea could acquire a taste for naval expansion by beholding German might afloat and so vote the necessary appropriations. And the German did so vote notwithstanding that he was already groaning under taxation that kept afoot the most powerful army in the world and that a huge German navy was not even pretended to be for the purpose of defense.

Campaign to Raise an Army.

The huge army raised by England during the present war was recruited by adin connection with it is to pay the bill. And the average citizen's share is so small that as a rule he is willing to pay. But a navy is not sufficent in itself. Before August, 1914, it never occurred to the British people that a war could come about in which the national existence could only be safeguarded by putting vertisement. And even in England, at war and with an army in the field, it took time and a great deal of campaigning to arouse the people at large to a sense of their obligations. A navy is really nothing but a glorified gun. All that the average citizen is required to do into the field at army commensurate with her naval strength. But that is exactly what she had to do.

The Congressman who habitually votes against military and naval appropriations usually does so because he thinks the inhabitants of the inland regions are too far from the sea to take an interest in battleships. And this is generally true. Then it also enables him to pose as an economist, though when it is a question of getting a costly postoffice or a wad for the widening of Sandy River he is a spendthrift to the core. The question is how to convert the farmer and how to get at the people of Los Angeles, where there are 200,000 pacifists and "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" is literally the most popular cabaret song of the season.

If a nation is well supplied with material for officering troops it has won three-quarters of the battle. The United States has no power to go into the several states and establish training corps in connection with the high schools. Yet this is what should be done. Some states might refuse to participate in such an arrangement. It is not likely that many would. Each state should be invited to establish a certain number of such corps on a basis of about 2 cadets per thousand of population. Each corps should exist in connection with a certain group of high schools. The term of training should be not less than two nor more than four years. The officers and noncommissioned officers by whom the corps should be officered and trained should be of the regular army and should be so ranked that each State could put into the field fully officered a certain number of battalions, regiments, etc. A spirit of rivalry between individuals, corps and the aggregate corps of different states should be kept alive by contests of various kinds. The work need not interfere with the usual scholastic work of the high school boy. But it should be very thorough and include a great deal of physical training, complete knowledge of the mechanism of machine gun and field artillery, entrenching and so forth, and something of the theory of war. An arrangement of this kind would give the United States at the end of two years approximately 210,000 men and at the end of six years, allowing for wastage, 600,000. Then the strength of the various corps could be cut down so as to leave enough men in training to allow for wasteage which would be about 50,000 a year.

In addition there should be provision made for an additional course of three years for a certain number of the more promising two-year men who would be willing and able to take it. This three-year course should be worked out by the cadet being attached with subaltern's rank to one of the line regiments. His education would be largely in his own hands, but he should be subject to periodical examination.

No doubt there are many men in the army today who have formulated far better schemes increasing the potentalities of the United States army than that outlined here. The essential point to be insisted upon at the present time is that before we can hope to get the army we shall have to train the people to a state of mind in which they will be willing for us to have the army, and when that is done to put into effect a scheme which will support interest and rivalry not only among the cadets themselves, but among the voters and politicians and political communities under whose jurisdiction they happen to be.